

*Coverage of U.S./Central
American aid vote &
in Senate Appropriation
Committee.*

U.S./CENTRAL
AMERICAN AID

JENNINGS: Here in Washington, the president has been trying to get more money out of Congress for those forces backed by the CIA who are trying to bring down the government in Nicaragua. Today the White House went to the Senate Appropriations Committee. It is controlled by the Republicans, but as Charles Gibson reports, today at least, that didn't make any difference.

GIBSON: With opposition to its Central American aid requests increasing, the administration attempted an end run. The strategy was to try and get the Senate Appropriations Committee to add funds for Central America onto two bills near and dear to most congressmen's hearts. A bill for low energy income assistance, the administration wanted to add to that \$21 million for the rebels in Nicaragua. A bill to send food to drought-stricken Africa, the administration wanted to add to that \$93 million in military aid for the government in El Salvador. Stevens of Alaska led the administration forces, arguing the need for haste. SEN. TED STEVENS (R-Alaska): I can tell you now that if we do not act before May, there will be a very dangerous hiatus as far as Central America is concerned.

GIBSON: But Hatfield of Oregon bristled at the sudden administration power play. SEN. MARK HATFIELD (R-Ore.): I find it most difficult to comprehend. Somehow on March 8 1984, we face a deadline that we only heard about as, that I only heard, as the chairman of the committee, yesterday.

GIBSON: Domenici defeated the administration strategy for now by the narrowest of margins, 15-14. Some in the majority accused the State Department of blundering. VOICE OF SEN. PETE DOMENICI (D-N.M.): They have handled this about as poorly as anything I have seen in my 11 years and three months. SEN. PATRICK LEAHY (D-Vt.): Well, I think the administration's tactic's a poor one.

GIBSON: Secretary of State George Shultz scurried to Capitol Hill to try to repair some of the damage but left without having done so. Leaders here seem agreed Mr. Reagan will eventually get some of what he wants for Central America, but the State Department's tactics today didn't win them any friends here on Capitol Hill. Charles Gibson, ABC News, at the Capitol.

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RATHER: Good evening. This is the CBS Evening News, Dan Rather reporting. A political firefight over President Reagan's Central American policy was waged today in a Senate committee. The administration's battle for an end run around Congress was lost, but its war was far from over. Robert Schakne reports.

SCHAKNE: The administration tried some political hardball today, an attempt to bypass regular congressional committees in favor of a quick vote to triple military aid to El Salvador and to expand the cover war against Nicaragua to record levels. The Nicaragua proposal calls for increasing from 24 to \$45 million this year's budget for the CIA-financed war against the Sandinista government, more money than has ever been spent before in a single year in the not-so-secret covert operation. The Salvador proposal would increase military aid to that country from 45 million to \$138 million, also a record level. It would bypass a congressional human rights restriction, that the killers of four American churchwomen first be brought to justice before any additional aid is provided. The administration tactic, a parliamentary maneuver to attack the two proposals to completely unrelated bills before the Senate Appropriations Committee. But when Sen. Ted Stevens attempted to add the Nicaragua covert aid proposal to a fuel assistance bill for poor people, the tactic backfired. SEN. TED STEVENS (R-Alaska): Gentlemen, there's no alternative. It takes more than two months for money to get into a pipeline for covert activities. And you must decide today whether that's going to be continued. SEN. MARK HATFIELD (R-Ore.): I find it most difficult to comprehend somehow on March 8, 1984, we faced a deadline that we only heard about, I only heard about as the chairman of the committee yesterday. VOICE OF SEN. PETE DOMENICI (R-N.M.): If the State Department is gonna manage the remaining activities in an effort to establish a policy with reference to Central America the way they've managed this episode, I guarantee them, and I guarantee the president for whom they work that they're gonna fail. VOICE OF SEN. STEVENS: I wanna tell you about some people that you're gonna embarrass the hell out of if you, if you go ahead the way you're goin'.

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SCHAKNE: Embarrassment or not, three Republicans deserted the administration. Covert aid proposal lost in the committee by a single vote. After that the committee put off considering the Salvador aid proposal until next week. It's not clear just what the next administration tactic will be. If all else fails, the president has emergency powers to send temporary aid to El Salvador without congressional approval. Robert Schakne, CBS News, Washington.

RATHER: A Senate Intelligence Committee source told CBC News that during a closed door session today Secretary of State Shultz apologized for the way the White House tried to bypass the committee process on the Central American aid increases. Shultz said that what the White House tried to do, quote, 'was no way to do it.'

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BROKAW: This was not a good day for President Reagan's Central American policy in Congress. He was dealt a setback in his attempt today to send emergency aid to CIA-backed rebels in Nicaragua. The Republican-controlled Senate Appropriations Committee voted down a request for \$21 million for those American-backed guerrillas. The vote was 15-14. And the committee postponed until next week another proposal for \$93 million in emergency military aid for the Salvadoran army. But with the coming elections in El Salvador, Fred Francis has learned that the administration is planning another kind of support.

FRANCIS: NBC News has learned that more than 2,000 American combat troops will be sent to the troubled Honduran-Salvadoran border region over the next two months for what the Pentagon is calling 'emergency readiness exercises.' Several thousand Honduran troops will join the U.S. infantry units in what is described as a major effort to show support for the Salvadoran army by posing a threat to Salvadoran guerrillas who operate freely on the Salvadoran side of the border. One official said, 'It's our hope that the guerrillas will worry about us and not disrupt the Salvadoran elections this month.' The GIs will be from the 93rd infantry brigade in Panama. A State Department official said they will avoid contact with guerrillas, but those GIs on the border will have live ammunition. Asked if they might cross the border, the official replied, 'Where's the border?' In fact, the border is not defined in much of the region. Because of that, the guerrillas have reason to worry about the exercises. Pentagon sources said that Honduran army commandos last year attacked guerrillas several times well inside Salvador's *Morezan Province, a guerrilla stronghold. 'We want the guerrillas to fear that again,' said one official, 'and that may take some pressure off the Salvadoran army.' The exercises will begin next week with U.S. Army reconnaissance planes flying over guerrilla positions in El Salvador. One State Department official said, 'We are not going to war there, but we will continue to show force in support of our friends.' Fred Francis, NBC News, the State Department.

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EL SALVADOR/
U.S. AID

HUNTER-GAULT: Over in the House of Representatives, Speaker Tip O'Neill said today that Democratic leaders will oppose administration efforts to send \$93 million in emergency military aid to El Salvador. O'Neill criticized what he called the White House's 'back door approach' to link the emergency aid to other legislation.

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NICARAGUA/U.S.
AID

HUNTER-GAULT: Reagan administration efforts to gain emergency aid for the CIA-backed Nicaraguan rebels was blocked today by the Republican-controlled Senate Appropriations Committee. The \$21 million aid request was defeated on a 14-to, 15-to, excuse me, to-14 vote. Members of the committee complained about both the administration's call for emergency aid and its legislative tactics, that is, tacking the military aid to a bill on energy assistance for low-income citizens. SEN. TED STEVENS (R-Alaska): Gentlemen, there's no alternative. It takes more than two months for money to get into a pipeline for covert activities. Now, you must decide today whether that's going to be continued, because they're, there are people that are in, just as much in need of a, a decision as those who are affected by low-income, uh, energy problems, and I... Four of us have just returned from Central America where, where we visited these, the installations in Honduras, and we visited with some of the people that were involved in the covert activities. And I can tell you now that if we do not act before May, there will be a very dangerous hiatus as far as Central America is concerned. SEN. MARK HATFIELD (R-Ore.): Low-income energy fuel assistance recipients are hurting today. I would venture that if you add this amendment, even if we were able to conclude this meeting today, and I doubt if we could even conclude it today, you're going to find it literally weeks before you get any action through this Congress to help those people who are already hurting today. Now, that's the alternative. You either are going to, you're either going to further the Central American political, military policies of this administration on the backs of the people who are already poor and hurting, or you're going to give them some relief within a reasonable few days.